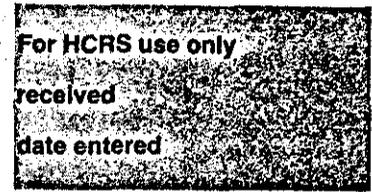


**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**



See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic First National Bank Building (preferred)

and/or common Old First and Merchants National Bank Building

2. Location

street & number 825-27 East Main Street ___ not for publication

city, town Richmond N/A vicinity of congressional district Third (Thomas J. Bliley, Jr.)

state VA code 51 county (In City) code 760

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property (A new partnership being formed to purchase the building.)

name FNB Associates I

street & number 207 W. Franklin Street

city, town Richmond ___ vicinity of state Virginia 23220

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. City Hall

street & number 900 E. Broad Street

city, town Richmond state Virginia 23219

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date June 12, 1980 ___ federal state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

city, town Richmond state Virginia

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Architectural Summary

The tallest structure in Richmond when completed in 1912, the First National Bank Building remains one of the city's finest examples of Neoclassical commercial architecture. Nineteen stories in height, it was the first high-rise office tower to be built in the city. The steel-frame structure is clad in limestone, granite and brick. The exterior, monumental in scale, is defined by heroically proportioned pilasters at the ground level while the interior spaces are organized within the 20' x 20' bays set by the twelve internal columns. A service/core area is located along the west wall. The rich architectural ornament follows the Corinthian order both within and without. Elaborately modeled, terracotta ornament on the exterior is concentrated at the base and in the top four floors of the building. The banking room and the elevator lobby, both at the building's entrance level, are the most noteworthy interior spaces. Rusticated marble walls with arched reliefs, as well as heavy brass railings and intricately carved elevator doors imbue the main bank spaces with elegance and dignity. This quality has survived the seventy years following the building's opening. Despite some changes in surface finishes, most significantly the loss of the cornice, the building has retained the monumental character and distinction which have made it a landmark in downtown Richmond.

Detailed Analysis

The exterior of the First National Bank Building is divided into four bays on the Main Street elevation, and five bays on the Ninth Street side. The base of the building, the lowest four floors, is punctuated by fifty-foot-high fluted Corinthian pilasters at the corners and engaged columns in between. These engaged columns support a seventeen-and-one-half-foot entablature rich with classical ornament. Medallions and carvings in the frieze alternate with the fifth story windows. Rosettes decorate a cornice supported by dentils and modillions. The architrave on both north and east facades bears the carved inscription "FIRST NATIONAL BANK". A lower ornamental architrave demarks the third floor level. The area between the pilasters and columns is infilled with windows, making this building a clear predecessor to the curtain wall structures which have dominated commercial high-rise architecture since the 1950s. The relative simplicity of the brick "shaft" or tower block section of the building contrasts markedly with its heavily decorated base and cornice. The top four floors of the building form a "capital". Similar to the base, limestone pilasters on all sides mark the building's

(See Continuation Sheet #1)

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

FIRST NATIONAL BANK BUILDING, RICHMOND, VA

For HCRS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet #1

Item number 7

Page 1

(7)

DESCRIPTION

structure and support an ornate entablature from which the cornice has been removed.

The interior of the First National Bank Building has its richest decoration in the banking room and in the elevator lobby. Marble clad columns support low-springing arches which frame groin vaults once stenciled with a mosaic pattern. The walls of the two-story, twenty-five-foot high space, originally lined with pink Knoxville marble, now feature rather saccharine murals illustrating historic Virginia houses. Light floods the space from the windows infilling the area between the engaged columns on the east wall. In the center of the banking room, a marble stair leads down to the vault room through a lozenge-shaped opening surrounded by a handsome, heavy, brass rail. Marble counters on the west side of the room, which mark the teller stations, are the only remaining original fixtures in the banking room. The elevator lobby was notable for its beautiful bronze and marble finishes. The ornately carved bronze elevator doors and handsome brass mail box are regrettably the only elements in this area which remain unaltered although much of the original fabric apparently remains under the later trim. The vault room below contains two hand-made circular vault doors made by the Diebold Company in Canton, Ohio. Reputedly hauled up Main Street Hill by mules, the vaults were installed early in the building's construction. The vault doors, still in use, are unique examples; the only remaining two of their kind.

The upper floors of the building consist of a core of elevators, service, and mechanical spaces. The office area was partitioned by thick masonry walls according to the occupant's needs. The office spaces were architecturally undistinguished. The partitions have changed over time while the core has remained essentially the same. In short, the overall integrity of the structure has not been threatened, although alterations have taken place, particularly in the 1960s. In 1963 the renovations to the interior and exterior brought about the removal of the mezzanine level in the banking room. Concrete panels filled in the windows on the third, fourth and fifth floors. Mosaics which ornamented the walls and ceilings of the banking room were removed or covered with plaster. In 1966 extensive deterioration forced the removal of the eleven-foot-deep cornice which cantilevered twenty stories above the street.

The First National Bank Building represents a competent as well as innovative design by a talented turn-of-the-century architect. It is not only a fine example of the learned application of Neoclassical ornament and proportion, but is as well a very early example of the commercial high-rise structures which by mid-century defined the skyline of every American city.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1911-1913 **Builder/Architect** Alfred Charles Bossom in assoc. with Charles W. Clinton.

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Statement of Significance

The First National Bank Building is one of the finest examples of turn-of-the-century Neoclassical Revival Architecture in the city of Richmond. This outstanding commercial structure, completed in 1913, was also the city's first high-rise tower. The building combines monumental scale and fine detailing with the technological daring inherent in early steel-frame, high-rise construction. It was designed by Alfred Charles Bossom, an associate with the prominent New York architectural firm of Clinton and Russell. With its terra cotta ornament, carefully proportioned Corinthian columns, and elegant banking rooms, Bossom's design for the First National Bank Building fully embodied the Neoclassical style, then deemed appropriate for financial institutions. Located in the heart of Richmond's financial district, the First National Bank Building is a symbol of the economic vitality of the Commonwealth, serving for more than half a century as headquarters for the state's oldest banking institution, now known as First and Merchants National Bank. The tallest structure in Richmond when constructed, the towering edifice gave visible proof of Richmond's emergence as a modern metropolis by the first decade in the twentieth century.

Background Information

Established in April 1865, eight days after Lee's surrender at Appomattox, and three weeks after Richmond's disastrous evacuation fire, First National Bank was founded by respected financial leaders who wanted to pull the fallen city through the difficult period of Reconstruction. When the Confederacy fell at the close of the Civil War, the Federal Government revoked the charters of all banks whose loyalty to the Union might be suspect. Richmond continued without a banking establishment until a group of Richmonders met with northern banker Hamilton G. Fant and associates, and agreed to establish a bank in Richmond under

(See Continuation Sheet #2)

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

FIRST NATIONAL BANK BUILDING, RICHMOND, VA

Continuation sheet #2

Item number 8

Page 1

For HCRS use only
received
date entered

(8)
SIGNIFICANCE

Federal charter. First National Bank opened its office in the old Custom's House on May 10, 1865, welcoming Robert E. Lee as one of its first customers. The bank soon merged with National Exchange Bank, moving in 1868 from its original one room office on Bank Street (now Governor Street) to a commercial structure at Tenth and Main Streets. Despite difficult and threatening circumstances the bank survived the panic of 1873 and prospered through the later financial crisis of the 1890s. By the turn of the century, First National had the highest total assets of all eighteen banks then in the city, providing needed capital for Richmond's expanding industry and commerce.

In 1910 the Bank's Board voted to build a new structure on Main Street to house its offices. Desirous of employing the latest in design and technology, the Board hired the firm of Clinton and Russell to fashion the Bank's new headquarters. Clinton and Russell had designed some of the earliest high-rise buildings in New York, and with the George Fuller Construction Company (also of New York), they brought the high-rise to Richmond. The architect for the project was Alfred Charles Bossom (1881-1964), a native of England who later designed the Vepco Building (1913), and the Virginia Trust building (1919), as well as other notable Richmond structures. It is significant that the First National Bank Building is one of a group of three adjacent buildings - the Mutual Building and the Virginia Trust Building being the other two - each designed by Bossom or his associate firm Clinton and Russell. Each of the three structures was the headquarters of a major financial or business institution, located at the corner of Ninth and Main Streets in the heart of Richmond's central business district, and only a block away from the State Capitol.

On June 10, 1913, the bank moved its offices into the new high-rise, then the tallest building in the city. Bossom's design for the First National Bank Building demonstrated the learned application of Neoclassical elements to a revolutionary, steel-frame commercial structure. Its rich classicism, inspired by the monumental scale and proportions of Greek and Roman architecture, was the prevailing fashion for public and commercial architecture in turn-of-the-century America. It embodied a purity of form and implied a cultural past which particularly appealed to the modern capitalist who sought in American society the order and legitimacy represented by Neoclassical motifs. The

(See Continuation Sheet #3)

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

FIRST NATIONAL BANK BUILDING, RICHMOND, VA

For HCRS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet #3

Item number 8

Page 2

(8)

SIGNIFICANCE

design of the tower also reflected the careful use of the golden rectangle, a highly formal geometrical device used by architects to proportion their buildings. The symmetry of the elevations and the axially of the main floor plan combined with the lavish but controlled classical ornament to give the building clarity, formality, and elegance.

Fourteen years after opening its offices at Ninth and Main, First National merged with Merchants Bank to become First and Merchants National Bank in February 1926. The First National Bank Building enjoyed its prominence on the downtown skyline until the 1960's building boom, which brought new skyscrapers rivalling and surpassing the height of the older structure. The First and Merchants Bank continued to maintain its headquarters in the old high-rise until 1975 when a large office complex was completed further to the east on Main Street. The older structure has been maintained for office rental. Despite these changes in use, the First National Bank Building has retained its integrity as a historically and architecturally significant structure. Plans are now underway for the stately edifice to be renovated for luxury office space in the center of Richmond's financial district.

MHS

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

FIRST NATIONAL BANK BUILDING, RICHMOND, VA

Continuation sheet #4

Item number 9

Page 1

For HCRS use only
received
date entered

(9)

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Building, 26 sheets (4 elevations, 22 floor plans) dated 1911.

Chamber of Commerce, Richmond, Virginia, Yesterday and Today,
Richmond, Virginia: 1914

Pulley, Raymond, H., Old Virginia Restored, Charlottesville,
Virginia: The University Press of Virginia, 1968

Williams, Frances Leigh, A Century of Service, Richmond,
Virginia: 1965

Wilson, Richard Guy, ed. The American Renaissance 1876-1917,
Brooklyn New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1979

9. Major Bibliographical References

Archives, Valentine Museum, Richmond, Virginia

Bossom, Alfred Charles, with Charles W. Clinton. Blueprints of original architectural drawings in maintenance office of First National Bank
(See Continuation Sheet #4)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 8,000 Sq. ft.

Quadrangle name Richmond, VA

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A

1	8	2	8	4	6	9	0	4	1	5	7	1	5	0
Zone				Easting				Northing						

B

Zone				Easting				Northing						

C

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

D

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

E

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

F

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

G

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

H

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Verbal boundary description and justification The building occupies the SW corner of Ninth and East Main Streets, on a lot measuring 78.42' x 102', the former fronting on East Main Street. Richmond Real Estate Assessor's Map reference W000-0010/008.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county N/A code

state N/A code county N/A code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mary Harding Sadler, Architect

organization SWA Partnership, Architects date February 9, 1982

street & number 1705 E. Main Street telephone (804) 782-9444

city or town Richmond state Virginia 23223

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature H. Bryan Mitchell

H. Bryan Mitchell
title Acting Director, Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission date FEB 16 1982

For HCRS use only	
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	
	date
Keeper of the National Register	
Attest:	date
Chief of Registration	

